LYRIC THEATRE

The Patter Post

The newsletter of Lyric Theatre,
the performing arm of
the Gilbert and Sullivan Society of San José

July 2022 *Light Opera Festival*

The President's Tuppence

By Larry Tom

Out of the Woods

You wish to have the curse reversed?
I'll need a certain potion first
Go to the woods and bring me back:

1. Exciting Shows
2. Terrific Casts
3. Enthusiastic Audiences
4. Ongoing Continuity

Those of you familiar with Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods* will recognize these lines, although they may look a little different. Those of you who do not know of the reference will have a chance this summer to become acquainted with this delightful story.

As I just said, however, these lines are a little different from what you have heard before. They've been adapted for our current times. For indeed, it seems that we've spent the better part of the past two years "in the woods." Now, hopefully, it is time to leave the woods!

The above-mentioned curse? None other than the COVID-19 pandemic, of course. This curse stopped all productions and shuttered our stage for twenty-one months. It has affected our theater, our community, and even ourselves. We've been wandering through the woods, in search of the ingredients that would help us recover. Perhaps these four items will be the magic that will restore a sense of normality.

1. Exciting Shows: In order for Lyric Theatre to leave the woods we have to bring to you a slate of productions that will rouse your interest and stimulate you to join us. In the San José Light Opera Festival I believe that we have done just that. True to our Gilbert & Sullivan roots we are presenting their most popular opera, *The Pirates of Penzance*. You will be thrilled to see this favorite show and hear the beautiful melodies once again.

In case the theme of this essay has not given it away, we are pleased to also offer Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods* during our summer Festival. This production is a combination of many of your childhood fairy tales all leading to a happily-ever after ending. But wait … that's only Act I. After the intermission things get a little more interesting. Okay, a LOT more interesting! Be sure to come and learn the story along with some of Sondheim's most memorable music.

The third leg of our San José Light Opera Festival will be a production called *Light Opera Around the World*. This will be a concert of familiar operetta favorites and along with beautiful songs of under-recognized composers from different cultures. We broke the ground during the shutdown with *Garden of Treasures*, a wonderful digital production of works by a diverse group of composers and presented by a top-notch cast. This production is still available at https://www.lyrictheatre.org/garden-of-treasures.

2. Terrific Casts: Of course, having the exciting shows is only the first ingredient. In order to give the potion a real "kick" you need the performers who will bring it to life. As I write this article, we are in the middle of our casting process for these shows, and never before have I been so enthralled by the possibilities. We have attracted a large group of auditioners, all whom are very talented. Our directors will have their hands full selecting the best of the best, and the result, I'm sure, will be delightful performances for all three of the productions planned for the Festival.

3. Enthusiastic Audiences: The third ingredient for this potion involves you, our audiences and loyal patrons. This magic elixir won't be effective without you there to see it, to hear it, and to enjoy it. A large audience to see these shows will add to the energy of both the performers and listeners, and will further enhance the overall impact. We will be back in the Hammer Theatre, a modern and beautiful venue for our Festival.

I know that many people are still hesitant to gather in groups because of the coronavirus. We understand and appreciate your concerns. Lyric Theatre adopted a strict COVID-19 policy and this will be updated in accordance with local and health department guidelines. We hope that we are well on the way to restoring normalcy, but will take whatever procedures are necessary to ensure the safety of everyone: cast, staff, and audiences.

4. Ongoing Continuity: So far we have gathered the ingredients for our brew to provide short-term relief. If we want to make this a long-term remedy then we must add the components that will ensure its longevity. We must add your continuing support for Lyric Theatre. This support can be added in many ways. Most importantly, of course, is to attend our productions. We have valued your attendance in the past and hope that you will continue to come, to bring friends, and to talk to others about our wonderful shows. Your word of mouth is our best marketing tool.

Another very important part of continuing support is our membership and donation campaigns. We were blessed with a strong donor base during this shutdown which allowed us to keep going even when we couldn't produce shows. But your monetary contributions can't stop now. We have found that costs for putting on our shows has been going up, and it is becoming more and more expensive to bring the high-quality productions that you have come to expect from Lyric Theatre. Thank you in advance for your contributions.

You can also provide that element of continuity by becoming involved. You can volunteer to help us backstage, or in the administration area (we are still looking for a treasurer!!), or perhaps you want to perform on-stage with us! Please let us know how you will be engaged with our operations!

So now we've gathered all of the ingredients: Exciting Shows, Terrific Casts, Enthusiastic Audiences, and Ongoing Support. Let's put them all together and—no, we're not going to feed them to a cow—let's get back together to see a wonderful Festival of shows.

It's time to leave the woods!

Notes on Directing

BY GARY DE MATTEI

Former New York Times theatre critic, Ben Brantley, when reviewing director Ian Rickson's transcendent 2008 Royal Court Theater production of Anton Chekhov's, *The Seagull*, wrote:

"One of the most wonderful paradoxes of the theater is deeply unhappy people can generate profound happiness in audiences allowed to eavesdrop on their lives."

I do believe with *The Pirates of Penzance* and *Into The Woods*, we not only have two productions chock full of unhappy people—with absurdities at their core rivalling many a Samuel Beckett play—but we also have two productions that will leave audiences with the feeling that—after each of their respective two-and-a-half-hour-stage-trafficking—someone must've been pumping nitrous oxide through the ventilation system of the Hammer Theatre Center.

A Chekhovian mantra that I adhere to religiously is: "The role of the artist is to ask questions, not answer them."

Whether I'm directing a play, musical, operetta, or a performance art piece in a fountain at a public park, my work as a theater artist begins with reading the text over and over again in an attempt to identify the hidden questions posed by the storytellers. I then like to inject said questions with helium so they not only float above my head throughout the production process, but also above the audience's heads during the entire performance.

THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE

When I'm in front of a group of actors about to start, say, rehearsals for *The Pirates of Penzance*, I'd probably open with something the great theater and film director, Mike Nichols, told one of my teachers, and they, in turn, told me, and now I'm telling you, dear reader: "Acting is you….in different circumstances."

So, the pressure is off, you don't have to pretend to be anyone else, just be yourself and play the circumstances of the character. Begin your character development with discovering your circumstances. For example, where are you? How does your location change your own personal experiences? If you've never been to 19th century Penzance, your research will show you that Penzance is a lot like Carmel-by-the-Sea. And if Carmel doesn't work for you, come up with a substitution that does (Key Word: "substitution"); a place you've actually

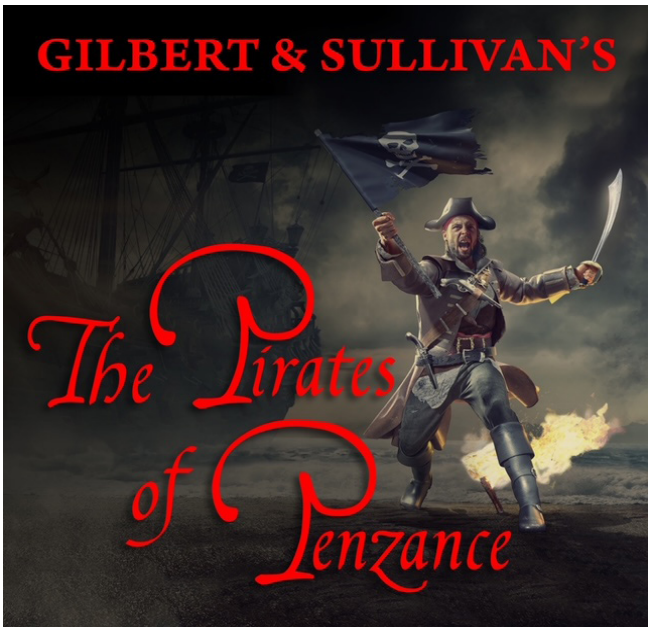
been to that gives you the same feeling of a sleepy affluent community by the shore. Maybe for you it isn't Carmel, maybe for you it's The Hamptons. If so, you're probably rich. And if that's the case, perhaps you'd like to consider making a tax-deductible contribution to Lyric Theatre of San José, or, at the very least, becoming a member.

But I digress. Wherever it is, think of Penzance as having been invaded by members of a privileged class masquerading as a gang of thieves in an era where certain groups of people are struggling for equal rights and income equality.

Yes, the objective of our production of *The Pirates of Penzance* is to give our audiences a good time while hitting all of the right notes, which also include the acting notes. And, maybe, while we're at it, we may leave you with a renewed faith in a community theater dedicated to producing operettas that spoof Victorian love, respectability, and the case for child protective service agencies. Not to mention that all-too-terrifying —and often dangerous— SENSE OF DUTY, as presented to you, in this case, by a wacky band of wannabe buccaneers, led by a charismatic, self-appointed King, Richard, and his de facto ward, Frederic, who, when just a little Freddie, was literally stolen from his father by the trusted nanny, Ruth, who, arguably, is the real pirate of the group that some feel should be locked up for life and the key thrown out to sea so that her stalking of poor Fred will cease and he can get on with living happily ever after in therapy with Mabel, the spontaneous ingenue with a mind of her own who isn't afraid to take a stand center stage and hit all the high notes, which couldn't be possible without her backup band, The Stanley Sisters in Distress…not to mention painful corsets. And speaking of bullet proof vests, don't forget that lovable crew of cowardly cops led by their shrinking violet in blue, Edward, the Sergeant of Police. And last, but certainly not least, our all-time family favorite, that very model of a modern Major General, Stan The Man, who lovingly epitomizes W.S. Gilbert's supreme credo: That of treating a ridiculous notion with the utmost seriousness.

Although there is much debate about this among Gilbert and Sullivan scholars, purists, fanatics, fascists, and such—we are setting our version of *The Pirates of Penzance* on 1 March, 1881. In short, we aren't updating the time-period of the piece to a present-day pool party at a fraternity house. (Which is not a bad idea…maybe next time.) No, we are saying that Frederic was born 21 years earlier, on 29 February, 1860. His 21st birthday will occur 88 years after birth, in 1948. Frederic is not at all good with sums, so the quick figuring he does in his head, stating he'll be of age in 1940, is off by 8 years. This we shall attribute to the fact that he's been at sea most of his life and his Nanny was relaxed in her homeschooling duties. She may indeed be a Maid of All Work…except when it comes to math.

The Pirates of Penzance has one of the silliest plots ever created to one of the most ingenious musical scores ever written, with enough "borrowed" operatic themes and motifs to make Andrew Lloyd Webber blush. All in support of underscoring unrequited love, parental abandonment, and a privileged class that has no time for respectability because they're too busy dressing up in Halloween costumes, waving homemade flags, and storming the steps of Penzance City Hall.



And after all of that is said and done, for me, T*he Pirates of Penzance* also asks the burning question: "Why poetry?" That's the balloon that floats above my head throughout the entire production process. Late in the first act, while watching one of the daftest scenes ever constructed on any page, the show stops and we are brought out of the comedy and into what I consider to be the soul of the piece:

> Hail, Poetry, thou heaven-born maid!
> Thou gildest e'en the pirate's trade:
> Hail, flowing fount of sentiment!
> All hail, Divine Emollient!

It's a wonderful five-part harmony moment reminding one that Arthur Sullivan wrote wonderful hymns, like "Onward Christian Soldiers," and, that as silly as the show is, Sullivan was a composer to be reckoned with and to steal from. And more importantly, a reminder that what we are witnessing is a work of musical and poetic art as crafted by a group of talented folks who got together and said: We must not forget our

sense of duty as artists, which is to not only entertain, but to nurture and enrich the human experience. And theatre, when it is done right—when there is harmony on the stage, as well as in the component parts—well, then we as artists have done the work, which is best explained in the words of the late, great Beat Poet, Alan Ginsberg, who, when asked the question, "What's the work?" replied:

> To ease the pain of living. Everything else, drunken dumbshow.

And some of us forget about poetry until we need it and thanks to groups like Lyric Theatre of San José— who have been around since 1972 producing poetry of one kind or another—we can experience these alchemical moments together in the dark. Most of the time we aren't too concerned with Ginsberg's poems, or W.S. Gilbert's poems, or anybody else's poems, until something tragic happens, like a pandemic. Or maybe somebody very close to us has shuffled off this mortal coil, and we are so heartbroken the only thing that will help us make sense of it all are the words of Dylan Thomas, beseeching us to "rage against the dying of the light."

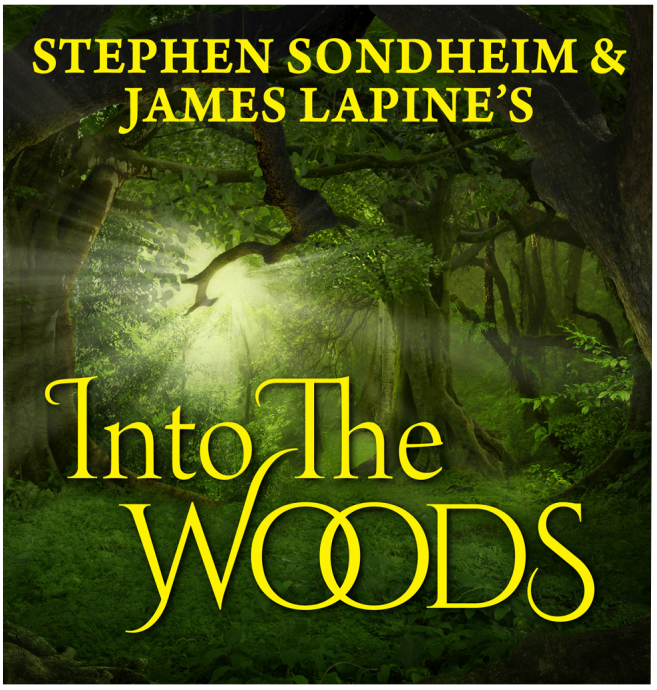
Or the opposite—something great happens—one enchanted evening we may see a stranger across a crowded room, and after we've dropped our N-95 masks, we fall madly in love with each other. And we build a life together, as artists living in New York City. And then we each get jobs—one acting in Wisconsin, the other directing *The Pirates of Penzance* and *Into The Woods* in California. And the work is good, but the feeling apart is bad, and too hard to explain over Zoom. So, before you lay your head on her pillow filled with organic buckwheat hulls, you reach for your pocket sonnets and post one on Facebook. And you tag her in it, and hope when she wakes, she'll know how you feel without her.

> Weary with toil, I haste me to my bed,
> The dear repose for limbs with travel tired;
> But then begins a journey in my head
> To work my mind, when body's work's expired:
> For then my thoughts–from far where I abide–
> Intend a zealous pilgrimage to thee,
> And keep my drooping eyelids open wide,
> Looking on darkness which the blind do see:
> Save that my soul's imaginary sight
> Presents thy shadow to my sightless view,
> Which, like a jewel hung in ghastly night,
> Makes black night beauteous, and her old face new.
> Lo! thus, by day my limbs, by night my mind,
> For thee, and for myself, no quiet find.
> — William Shakespeare, Sonnet 27

#HailPoetry

INTO THE WOODS

By now—thanks to the Disney film adaptation of the Broadway musical, directed by Rob Marshall, that was released in 2014 and grossed over $213 million worldwide—everyone has seen *Into The Woods*, the Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine adaptation of the Grimm fairy tales. The stage show has been printing money for the New York licensing house Music Theatre International since they acquired the rights at the end of the last century. Since then, the show has been done all around the globe, and at every level—from one-act Junior versions featuring children of all ages who do not listen to their directors, to full-length, stripped down, off-Broadway versions that just use a ladder and an upright piano on stage, to the most recent Encores revival at New York City Center featuring a star-studded cast that included Sara Bareilles as the Baker's Wife, Denée Benton as Cinderella, Neil Patrick Harris as the Baker, Heather Headley as the Witch, and a choir of singers who lined the aisles of the 2,750 seat New York City Center theater during the finale.



The Encores version was also the first professional New York production of *Into the Woods* produced without Mr. Sondheim's physical form in the world. For some of us who grew up doing theater over the past 40+ years and who credit Stephen Sondheim with the reason we fell in love with musical theatre in the first place, it's safe to say that at present, and because of his loss, we all feel a little like orphans. I, like so many others who've

made their life's work the theater, especially the musical theater, have grown up with Stephen Sondheim in my world. And through his art, his books, his videos, and on those rare occasions when he's been sighted at the theater or in a Manhattan restaurant, I have adopted him as not only one of my guides, but also as a surrogate parent. My first thought after his passing was, "How will I survive?" So, I went straight to his poetry and after reading several passages from Sweeney Todd aloud, about the world being a great black pit filled with people who are filled with… sadness because Stephen Sondheim is gone, I found this bit of text from *Into the Woods* to calm me down:

> Sometimes people leave you
> Halfway through the wood
> Others may deceive you
> You decide what's good
> You decide alone
> But no one is alone

So, as I do when I'm about to direct any production—be it a play I've never seen before or a classic I've seen hundreds of times—I research all there is to research about why the creators spent years and years writing and re-writing and workshopping and out-of-town try-outing, etc. And if there are any interviews from the creators on their arduous process, I devour them like Little Red devours the freshly baked sweets in the opening number. And thanks to the wealth of material written and recorded by the creators of *Into the Woods*, I was able to have several visits with Mr. Sondheim, and I listened to his cautionary tale about doing this show—which contain several traps— because I wanted to get it right, for him. Because for me, Stephen Sondheim is the real star of the piece. And I think more than anything else, a director's job is to do no harm to the material. And in this case, that also means, Do no harm to Stephen Sondheim. So, I listened carefully to my master's voice. And I took notes, and here they are, in no particular order of importance:

— First of all, the master said, *Into the Woods* is a show about a group of people who have various wishes and during the course of the show they get their wishes but in so doing upset the natural order of things and have to pay for it in the second act, and become a community and merge their individual wishes into a community wish and thereby save the world…so to speak.

— Start with *The Grimm Fairy Tales*. Go back to them. Read them. They are short by nature. In the Grimm version, Cinderella goes to the ball three times, she can't make up her mind.

— It is very important to keep the show bouncy; keep it moving.

— Little Red has the title number in the show.

— Jack is a guy who steals, if you look at Jack through the Giant's point of view, he's a villain— he comes to your house, steals all of your goodies and then kills your husband. That's the attitude of the Giant. Jack goes up to the Giant's house three times.

— Little Red starts out innocent and becomes a blood-thirsty killer. In the Grimm, she goes back into the woods a second time and kills another wolf.

— The Witch is the most direct and the most honest— you can't always equate nice with good.

— Act One is about the individual. The second act is about community, where we find out what the consequences are of the "individual mindset."

— Musically speaking, The Witch's five notes (five items) are a reflection of a plot point. The Witch's section is sometimes referred to as a rap section. "It is not rap, it's patter." — Stephen Sondheim

— The function of the opening number is exposition; you might assume everyone knows that Cinderella has a grave of her mother in the woods. Treat this as if no one has heard these stories before. The Witch's story has to be covered in some detail and this is where diction becomes very important and finding places to breathe becomes very important. The Witch's part is the most important in the opening number and diction is the key.

— The Five Notes: the function of these notes are the five magic beans (of the six), these five notes show up when it has to do with the beans.

— The opening number should have joy.

— The Witch works best when she's played scary; that she holds powers that affect.

— Cinderella is the toughest because she's so familiar. The notion that Cinderella talks to birds, she's a little out of the ordinary, she's a little spaced out, a little ditzy, she's not apple pie. The other thing is that she's not

just good, it's boring to be good. She pulls too hard on her step-sisters' hair. She's not just a good person. She's real.

— Jack is the dreamer, not dumb; he is in his own world.

— Jack's mom wants to keep Jack a child, otherwise she wouldn't know what to do.

— Rapunzel is a kid who's been locked in a tower for 17 years, so that speaks to her character. She definitely has a neurosis, so anything you can bring out there is good.

— The Baker and his Wife are the outsiders, they are sort of like that couple from Brooklyn who've drifted into the woods. They stand in for the audience. They find themselves in the forest with witches and spirits running around. They are the least extraordinary of the group. They're caught in the circumstances and that is basically the humor of the show.

— The Princes — you can go any number of different ways with these two. They're pampered and they're spoiled but don't make them an easy target; find their humanity, especially with Cinderella's Prince in the second act.

— The Mysterious Man — he's a father and not well drawn. He stands in for that kind of parent we have that we don't know and always wish to touch base with.

— "The Witch is a bad lady, someone you don't want as a neighbor." — James Lapine

— Little Red is a wide-eyed innocent until she meets the wolf. She makes a nice transformation.

— Look at your character's transformation. When do they change? What's that called?

— Parents tend to be distant.

— Stepsisters and Stepmother go against the obvious; don't play them mean. Make them grand and beautiful, their meanness will come through.

— The Narrator is a curious character, you can play him professorial or Jungian. He should be someone we want to listen to, someone we want to trust our future to, he has power.

— Agony — watch out for this number: it has a trap. The princes are rivals, they are caught in their own fantasy, but they're essentially saying, "I'm suffering more than you. My agony is far more painful than yours." It isn't just the unattainable girls, it's their rivalry, it's their contest; it's their own personal pain. This happens a lot with siblings.

— "No More" is a father/son song, a song that has no relationship. Don't keep it self-pitying, it's a song that is a determination for the Baker to go back. No More means he is not going to take any more of the destruction and he's saying we all have to act together as a community. That is what makes him go back.

— "No One" is Alone is a quartet for the four survivors, the older and the younger survivors. Cinderella changes the most. She becomes responsible. This is a parent/child song and should be thought of in that way. The point is this is not the kind of alone we're talking about, it's about being connected with each other, we all need each other. Musically speaking, this is where the "bean theme" finally becomes calm and it's at its most simple harmonically, even though they're singing against it. Think of this "bean theme" as being resolved here. And, therefore it will feel like the story is being resolved. So, the story is resolved because the story is the "bean theme," the inversion of the "bean theme" is "People make mistakes."

— Above all, focus on the intelligibility, the words, the intentions of the songs. What really matters is the audience understands the words.

— The end is "I Wish We Would All Live Happily Ever After."

#iWish

Light Opera Circles the Globe

BY DAVID BAMBERGER

Composers and librettists of the 19th century grand opera world loved to find new and inventive ways to thwart their characters' search for true love, concluding operatic evenings with tragic deaths. Verdi composed some of his greatest music to accompany infanticide (*Rigoletto*), tuberculosis—called "consumption" in those days—(*La Traviata*), suicide by poison (I*l Trovatore*), and suffocation in a tomb (*Aida*). In Germany, Wagner added new techniques to the list of theatrical demises: suicide by drowning (*The Flying Dutchman*), death from unconsummated love (*Tristan and Isolde*), and self-immolation (*The Twilight of the Gods*). In fact, Wagner set the highest possible bar by concluding The Ring Cycle with the destruction of the whole world!

If violence, bloodshed, and tragedy were dominating "heavy opera"—if these composers and their con-temporaries could profit from increasingly extreme expressions of Romanticism—wasn't there a place for an alternative? Couldn't someone reach back for inspiration to the lighter works of Mozart (*The Marriage of Figaro*), Rossini (*The Barber of Seville*), and Donizetti (*Don Pasquale*) to rival—and even satirize—the heavyweights? Couldn't one make a lot of money doing it?

The answer was "yes." The man who found the way to put it all together and establish "light opera" firmly on the map of popular culture was Jacques Offenbach.

Offenbach was the son of a German synagogue cantor. A precocious cellist, he was accepted as a student at the Paris Conservatory when only fourteen. He found academia boring, however, and after one year of study he left the school, determined to make his living as a performer, conductor, and ultimately composer.

The first works he created for the stage were small in scale, due to licensing restrictions, but in them he began to establish the pattern for light opera. Dialogue alternated with music, providing more room for variety and wit than the traditional alternating of sung numbers and recitative. Arias and ensembles tended to be shorter than in traditional opera, and they were more focused on fun than on brilliant vocal display.

In 1858, the French government changed its rules and allowed larger works. Offenbach seized the opportunity to expand his light opera model to include a large cast, elaborate scenery, dance, and satire. His new work he called *Orpheus in the Underworld*.

Orpheus is a riotous and bawdy send-up of classicism. The ancient Greek tale of Orpheus tells of his heartbreak when his beloved wife Eurydice dies. Refusing to be consoled, he risks everything by descending into Hades to find her and bring her back to life.

Offenbach's version turns the story on its head. Here Orpheus and Eurydice are locked in a disastrous marriage. They loathe each other! When Eurydice succumbs to a snakebite, Orpheus is only too happy to forget about her. To his regret, a woman representing Public Opinion forces him to attempt to rescue her from death. Individuals may misbehave in private, but convention requires that they appear to observe marital fidelity in public!

Complications ensue. The snake that bit Eurydice turns out to be the god Pluto in disguise. He did not really kill her. His goal was to bring her to his underworld kingdom and, more specifically, to his bed. The other Olympian gods get involved and travel to Hades to see what is going on. They decide to enjoy themselves with a dance, but Jupiter calls for a minuet which everyone else finds boring. Instead, they throw themselves into the "Galop infernal"—the sequence that we know as "the can-can."

Offenbach had hit the proverbial jackpot. *Orpheus in the Underworld* was a grand success. The composer would go on to produce a total of 18 full-length operettas, as well as some 80 one-act pieces. The most successful were presented in translated versions in the great cities of Europe. The age of light opera was launched.

In London, a young producer, Richard D'Oyly Carte, became involved in presenting another of Offenbach's operettas, *La Périchole*. Since long programs were the fashion in Victorian England, Carte needed to supplement it with some other entertainment. He remembered a libretto that had been shown to him by a lawyer-turned-playwright, William S. Gilbert. A few years before, Gilbert had collaborated with composer Arthur Sullivan on a piece they called *Thespis*. Carte brought the two men together and the result was *Trial by Jury*. It was an unexpected triumph, outrunning the Offenbach piece, and providing the foundation for the great G&S collaboration.

Meanwhile, in Vienna, Johann Strauss II had decided to branch out from the wildly successful orchestral works that had made him "The Waltz King." Light opera seemed to offer new and lucrative opportunities. On April 5, 1874, just 11 months before the premiere of *Trial by Jury*, Strauss opened his stage masterpiece, *Die Fledermaus*. Before the year was out, the new work had been cheered in New York City, and it continued a rapid tour of stages around the world.

This launched the so-called Golden Age of Viennese operetta, which would be followed by a Silver Age highlighted by *The Merry Widow* of Franz Lehar. *Die Fledermaus* itself moved from strength to strength. Twenty years after its premiere, Gustav Mahler produced it at the Hamburg Opera House, where he was chief conductor. This gave the operetta a unique status of respectability for production by opera companies. It has remained in the repertoire of the world's leading opera houses ever since.

Spain developed its own light opera tradition: the zarzuela. As with light operas everywhere, it used considerable dialogue alternating with musical numbers, and the singing was in the Italian vocal tradition. On the other hand, the style of music and dance was specifically Spanish. The zarzuela spread to many Spanish-speaking countries, notably Cuba and the Philippines. A zarzuela company in Mexico provided early training for the owners' talented son—a young man destined to worldwide fame, Placido Domingo.

The United States of the 19th century took its cultural cues from Europe, and its theatergoers flocked to see British operettas in both original and—more frequently—imitation versions. Within two years of the London premiere of Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore*, there were about 150 unauthorized productions of the piece in North America! The next G&S collaboration, *The Pirates of Penzance*, was premiered in New York in an attempt to gain copyright protection for the authors' works. The effort was unsuccessful, but the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company was still able to tour to North America profitably until 1978.

Eventually, Americans began to look for original American works. Early in the 20th century, they found what they wanted. What became known as "American operetta" was actually created by immigrant composers who wrote in the Viennese style! From the U.K. came Victor Herbert who captivated audiences with shows like *Babes in Toyland* and *Naughty Marietta*. Rudolf Friml, a Czech, triumphed with *Rose-Marie* and *The Vagabond King*. Finally, the Hungarian Sigmund Romberg was heralded for such works as *The Student Prince* and *The Desert Song*. Unfortunately, these pieces tended to have very weak scripts—the brilliance of Gilbert was nowhere to be found—but the shows delivered many wonderful tunes that became extremely popular.

The premiere of *The Desert Song* in 1926 marked the beginning of the end of the great age of operetta. The following year, the American-born Jerome Kern opened *Show Boat*, creating a whole new genre—a musical play dealing with serious themes such as racial prejudice and tragic love, with songs that incorporated American musical idioms.

But that's another story. And, of course, there are many great songs from around the world that didn't come from light operas. Be prepared to enjoy some of them as well as we share a program of international musical delights!

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News & Notes

Annual Membership Meeting

On May 22, The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of San José (our corporate name) held its annual membership meeting at St. Jude's Episcopal Church in Cupertino, where we regularly have our rehearsals. This event was a pot-luck affair and was well attended in person and on-line.

After the president's address (see below), some live song selections from our upcoming Light Opera Festival were performed by the stellar casts we have engaged for the festival. Thanks to Sage Alberto, Benjamin Belew, Ariel Estebez, Michael Kuo, Peter Woolhouse, and Paul Zawilski for providing the entertainment.

One of the duties performed at the annual membership meeting is the election of officers for the coming year. After the entertainment, votes were tallied and the following people were elected to two-year terms: Diana Torres Koss, Sharon Martin, Aishu Ramamurthi, Larry Tom, and Paul Zawilski. Larry Tom will be stepping down as president after steadfastly guiding us through the last three years and especially the last two years of the pandemic. Sharon Martin will be taking on the reigns of President of the organization. Thanks especially to Larry and all who continue to give their time and effort generously to Lyric Theatre.

Here is the report provided by our president, Larry Tom, on the state of the organization:

Lyric Theatre has weathered a lot over the past year. Like all of our sister theater companies we have struggled with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, ever-changing restrictions, and attempts to restart our productions. It hasn't been easy, but we've been lucky. Our donor base has kept us afloat financially, and we haven't had to postpone or cancel any productions. As we look forward to our next fiscal year, we can ask ourselves: Are we back to normal? Are we out of the woods?

Before we attempt to answer those questions let's take a quick review of this past year. The year saw us continue to find our place in the digital arena. Past productions were made available on YouTube, and, with Asha Kelly's leadership and vision we produced the wonderful *Garden of Treasures*, a collection of songs from the late-19th and early 20th Century by a diverse set of composers. This production was recorded live in the beautiful garden of our board member Sharon Martin and is available on-line; you can find the link at our website.

We also ventured back into live performances. Prior to the pandemic we had selected the cast for *H.M.S. Pinafore*. Unfortunately, this was postponed and rescheduled repeatedly during the shutdown, and we finally found a date in December and a venue in the Hammer Theatre to bring back that cast, most of whom were still available and willing to perform. We got the show onstage to successful reviews, and found a wonderful performing hall for us going into the future.

We also returned to live caroling. Our Lyric Victorian Carolers started rehearsing in October and performed for some parties, retirement centers, and holiday gatherings throughout December. The numbers of gigs and carolers were down from previous years, but it was another step towards returning to normal.

The problem is, we may never get back to normal, or at least what we considered "normal." And just maybe, we don't want to go back to normal. First of all, the pandemic has changed the way we live, the way we entertain ourselves, and the way we interact with others. Secondly, we ourselves have outlined a new direction in the form of the San José Light Opera Festival, a departure from our traditional "Three Mainstage and a Discovery" yearly format. And thirdly, we need to change our focus, or rather should I say we should finally execute our focus, to expand our diversity and increase our reach into the community through education.

The pandemic has opened up many digital avenues for us to explore, and we have barely scratched the surface. We have a Digital Engagement Committee, led by Bruce Herman, that has been looking at how to expand our reach to the virtual world. Do we continue to offer past productions on YouTube? Do we create new virtual productions such as *Garden of Treasures*? Do we offer subscription services on channels like Patreon? And what about our live productions; do we live-stream these performances for our patrons who are still hesitant to return to in-person shows? Lyric Theatre will have to look different in the future to sustain its survival.

The new direction which we have chosen for ourselves is well underway. The San José Light Opera Festival is an attempt to try something new, to remove some of the past headaches of finding venues and performers, and to create a new sense of excitement amongst our participants, our audiences, and our community. This inaugural festival will feature Gilbert & Sullivan's popular *The Pirates of Penzance*, Stephen Sondheim's classic fairy tale mash-up *Into the Woods*, and a concert called *Light Opera Around the World* which will—true to its name—present its

audiences with a diverse collection of operetta selections from around the globe and with which we may not be very familiar. The casts for these productions has already been selected and rehearsals have started, and the excitement is building. Hopefully this year's festival will be a start of a new tradition for Lyric Theatre and draw audiences from well beyond its traditional geographic base.

The third area where we need to focus is on our stated goal of Education. We have long had this as part of our mission statement, but beyond having a free student concert once a year we have never had any concerted efforts to do anything about it. Now, however, we have the opportunity to finally achieve this goal. Preliminary discussions have been held regarding partnerships with organizations such as Starting Arts. Our relationship with the Hammer Theatre can hopefully lead to increased interaction with the San Jose State University theater department, for the Hammer Theatre is now operated by that school. Board members and other past performers have connections with schools and drama departments, and these need to be incorporated into our education goals. We have to face the honest truth: Our traditional Gilbert & Sullivan audience is diminishing in size, and our survival is dependent on educating a new, younger audience to the genres that Lyric Theatre presents.

As Lyric Theatre moves ahead, we need to concentrate on these three areas. We need to decide if we want to maintain a digital presence, and if so, then how to do so successfully. We need to put the required emphasis and work into the San José Light Opera Festival and make this an event that can become a nationwide (or bigger) destination. And finally we need to become serious about education and building the foundation for future fans of Lyric Theatre.

How would I sum up the state of the company right now? In one word: Changing. We can't go back to what was normal. That was successful for us … then. But now we need to look ahead. The pandemic has been a terrible thing, but it has forced us to look at ourselves, to evaluate what we have done in the past, and has given us the opportunity to emerge from it even stronger than before.

Larry Tom
President, Lyric Theatre

Digital Engagement

As mentioned in Larry's address, Lyric Theatre is looking to enhance our digital engagement with our audiences. The necessity of dealing with the pandemic has forced us to try a new approach with our live entertainment in the form of the upcoming Light Opera Festival. However, we still want to engage our patrons (and expand our appeal!) even when we are not on stage. Lyric Theatre is looking at Patreon as a platform to use to connect with people, but we'll need a lot of help to keep things going once our efforts have launched. We are, in particular, looking for volunteers who can help with the following tasks:

- **Promote our digital offerings once things are underway.** This task requires a person savvy in engaging with people on social media. The idea is to "talk-up" upcoming digital offerings to generate interest, with help from Lyric Theatre personnel.
- **Plan and develop upcoming offerings.** Lyric Theatre has a large backlog of recorded shows that we initially plan to use for our digital engagement. While this would be a staple of our offerings, we would also like to develop new content, such as G&S-themed trivia games, behind-the-scenes looks at Lyric Theatre productions, audio downloads, and so on. We are looking for two or three persons to help with this task.
- **Subtitle video content.** We plan to subtitle our shows to aid those who may be hard of hearing or just to enhance the enjoyment of Gilbert's (and other's) witty lyrics. With our large library of recorded productions, this will take quite an effort. Don't worry —we can show you what needs to be done!

If any of the above topics sound of interest to you or might appeal to someone you know, please drop us a line at info@lyrictheatre.org for more information, or just to volunteers@lyrictheatre.org if you want to jump right in!

Look for more information on Lyric Theatre's digital engagement in the near future.

Treasurer

Yes, we are still looking for someone to take over the duties of treasurer for the company. Our current treasurer, Peter Krajewski, has been looking to transition out of the role for some time now but we still have not found someone to take on his duties. These include managing the books for the company, providing monthly financial reports, filing state and federal tax returns, and handling deposits and disbursements. The new treasurer should be familiar with Quickbooks. Please drop a line to president@lyrictheatre.org if you or someone you know can help.

Thank You!

We are truly grateful to all who contribute to Lyric Theatre in any way. Donations above ticket sales provide us with the income needed to sustain our productions, as well as our outreach and educational programs. The following donations were received between Decmber 3, 2021, and June 26, 2022:

MEMBER DONATIONS

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† indicates sustained giving – To become part of our sustaining membership, please visit www.lyrictheatre.org and click on the donor tab. Sustaining memberships in any amount provide a base income for general operating expenses as well as production expenses.

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The Patter Post

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Pirates of Penzance –Tender hearted pirates meet innocent maidens. Hail Poetry!

Sat, Jul 23rd, 2022 at 2:00 pm — Sun, Jul 24th, 2022 at 2:00 pm
Thu, Jul 28th, 2022 at 8:00 pm — Sat, Jul 30th, 2022 at 8:00 pm
Sat, Aug 6th, 2022 at 8:00 pm

Into the Woods – Sondheim & Lapine do the Brothers Grimm. #i Wish!

Fri, Jul 29th, 2022 at 8:00 pm — Sun, Jul 31st, 2022 at 2:00 pm
Thu, Aug 4th, 2022 at 8:00 pm — Fri, Aug 5th, 2022 at 8:00 pm
Sun, Aug 7th, 2022 at 2:00 pm

Light Opera Around the World – Light opera favorites & songs of our international cast.

Sat, Jul 23rd, 2022 at 8:00 pm — Sat, Jul 30th, 2022 at 2:00 pm
Sat, Aug 6th, 2022 at 2:00 pm